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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RIGA 000087

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STATE FOR EUR/OHI (J BECKER), DRL/SEAS (G RICKMAN)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/15/2017

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SO](#) [CI](#) [LG](#)

SUBJECT: ANDRIS GRUTUPS AND THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF LATVIA

REF: A. 06 RIGA 924

[B](#). 06 RIGA 921

[C](#). 06 RIGA 959

[D](#). 07 RIGA 507

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador Charles W. Larson for Reason 1.
4(d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Andris Grutups is a prominent lawyer and closely connected to one of Latvia's most influential people - former PM Andris Skele. He is also often not far from the scene when charges of anti-Semitism are raised in Latvia. For example, in a late November 2007 interview with local press, Grutups accused then-Ambassador Bailey and former Latvian President Vike-Freiberga of threatening the job of then-Prime Minister Kalvitis if he did not pass Jewish property restitution legislation at the end of 2006. Furthermore, Grutups has made several dubious claims about "the Jews" in Latvia, and his publications have been condemned as anti-Semitic. He also sponsored a private showing of a play viewed as anti-Semitic for its seeming support for the blood libel charge. Grutups' behavior is more noteworthy due to his close relationship to oligarch Skele. We don't want to overstate the case, but the fact that someone as influential as Grutups can produce such bile with little or no public reaction is an indication that at least some amount of anti-Semitism is rather wide-spread in Latvia. End Summary

2 (U) On November 29, 2007, in an article published in the Latvian daily Neatkariga Rita Avize, prominent Latvian Lawyer Andris Grutups claimed that then-Ambassador Bailey and former Latvian President Vaira Vike-Freiberga made passage of Jewish property restitution legislation (reftels) in late 2006 a "condition" for Prime Minister Aigars Kalvitis to continue in his position as PM after the October elections in 2007. Neatkariga Rita Avize is controlled by Latvian oligarch, Aivars Lembergs, who is under house arrest for a number of corruption charges. The paper has a history of criticism of the U.S. embassy in Latvia and of Ambassador Bailey in particular.

A Busy Year of Anti-Semitism

[1](#)3. (SBU) Grutups is known for his weakly hidden anti-Semitic views. During the past year and a half, he has focused considerable energy on Jewish matters--showing a disturbing trend of criticizing "the Jews." He published articles in late 2006 attacking the proposed Jewish property restitution legislation, providing much of the intellectual cover for the legislation's eventual defeat. In early 2007, he staged a private showing of a play based on a book he wrote called "Belisade: on the court case of a boy murder believed to be committed by Jews in the beginning of the 20th century in Russia." The book and play discuss the Beilis Trial that took place in early 20th century Russia and involved the

"blood libel" accusation against Jews. The play was condemned by the head of the local Jewish community in Latvia, Arkady Suharenko, as clearly anti-Semitic. In addition, this past fall Grutups published a book called Scaffold that details the trail and execution in 1946 in Riga of several high ranking German officers. In this book Grutups purportedly accuses "the Jews" of welcoming the Soviets into Latvia--as well as making other inflammatory statements. Grutups presented copies of "Scaffold" to the Ministry of Education, though the ministry appears to have been unfamiliar with the contents of the book. We have since learned that the book has been distributed to all schools in Latvia, as Grutups requested, but is not included as part of any official curriculum. The Jewish community, political parties with strong Jewish support and the Israeli Embassy here all are stumped by how best to discredit the book without actually increasing its prominence.

14. (C) In response to Grutups' attacks on Ambassador Bailey, DCM met Latvian MFA State Secretary Normans Penke at the end of November to register Post's concern that an individual as politically connected as Grutups was making such accusations about the Ambassador--as well as publishing materials that assert Jewish culpability for the Soviet Occupation of Latvia, among other things. (Note: U/S for bilateral affairs, Edgars Skuja, urged the DCM to broach the issue with Penke. According to Skuja, Penke was troubled by Grutups behavior but needed an excuse to raise the issue with Foreign Minister Riekstins. The issue is a sensitive one for MFA officials to raise with Riekstins because he is very close to the People's Party. End Note.) Penke responded that the PM might distance himself from Grutups' specific accusations about Ambassador Bailey, but made no commitments regarding further actions People's Party officials might take to

RIGA 00000087 002 OF 002

distance themselves from Grutups in general. PolEconOff also raised the issue of Grutups comments with Ambassador Gints Jegermanis, the MFA's lead official on Jewish issues. (Note: To date, Post has seen no movement on the part of the GOL to distance itself from Grutups in general, or from any of his specific comments.)

Who is Andris Grutups?

15. (U) Though Andris Grutups has never been a member of any political party in independent Latvia (he was a member of the Communist Party in the Soviet period), he was very active in the re-establishment of Latvia's independence. His professional work at a very high political level for many years, as well as his close ties with ex-premier Andris Skele, have led to speculations that he has been one of the most influential people in Latvian political circles. Some claim that Grutups was the one who recommended the then politically unknown Andris Skele for the post of PM to president Guntis Ulmanis in 1995.

16. (U) From the beginning of the re-establishment of the independent state, Grutups was a key player in re-building Latvia's legal system. He is the author of a number of important original laws (e.g. The Law on De-nationalization of Real Estate) and the author of several legal texts such as "Litigation and Comments" and "Civil Law and its Comments" which are still highly regarded and relied upon by the Latvian legal profession. However, his overall contribution to re-establishment of the rule of law in Latvia is a subject of some debate.

17. (C) Grutups received the highest academic degree in Law in 1985 from the University of Latvia and worked in law enforcement and security establishments during the Soviet period--including in the Prosecutor's Office. There are persistent but unproven speculations that Grutups had ties to the KGB in Soviet times. Boris Cilevics, a Jewish member of parliament in Latvia, told emboff that Grutups is known for

being anti-Semitic in a very smart way that is not straightforward and open, but is well understood and supported by a part of the public and his circles. His father was a member of the Latvian Waffen SS.

A Tarnished Reputation

18. (C) A book called "Litigious Kitchen" published in August 2007 may have weakened Grutups' influence. The book contained allegedly taped conversations from Grutups' office in which he and his associates lobby and negotiate with certain Latvian judges to obtain positive rulings for Grutups' clients. Prominent Latvian journalist Ilze Jaunalksne told Post that "Litigious Kitchen" seriously damaged Grutups' reputation, but that he knows how to make people dependent and then use it to achieve the results he wants. Jaunalksne claimed that at one time Grutups may have had half of the Supreme Court and Riga Regional Court judges under his influence. According to Ingrida Karina-Berzina, a Latvian American attorney, Grutups' current reputation is as a member of the inner circle of the Latvian legal profession who is "a shady, money-making character," but he is also known as "someone who gets things done in a dirty system." She added that the whole system is so corrupt that few would be willing to point the finger at his behavior, as "so many are mixed up with him." She, too, stated that "Litigious Kitchen" weakened Grutups' influence.

Comment

19. (C) Grutups' statements to the press and his recent publications bring to light what is usually hidden below the surface in Latvian life: a strong undercurrent of intolerance, including anti-Semitism. That such a well-connected member of the political elite would express these convictions publicly says much about Latvian society. He is likely using his close ties to Skele as a vehicle that helps give him continued access and prominence despite his diminished standing. Ambassador Bailey gave a number of interviews in December and January prior to her departure in which she specifically spoke out against intolerance and anti-Semitism. However, Latvia has a very long way to go on issues of tolerance.

LARSON